

# DANBURY BRANCH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TASK 5

## ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

STATE PROJECT 302-008



## SECTION 18: VISUAL RESOURCES

MAY 2009

## SECTION 18. VISUAL RESOURCES

### INTRODUCTION

This section describes the visual resources in the study corridor. Visual resources contribute greatly to environmental quality, shaping the views and aesthetic experiences of people's daily lives. Visual resources include natural landscape elements as well as features of the built environment.

The quality of the visual experience depends on many factors, including the physical attributes of objects, the combination of objects and features in view, the location of visual elements in relation to the viewer, the condition of the elements, their uniqueness, viewer perceptions, and cultural connotations, among many others. Descriptions of landscape characteristics and features under existing conditions lay the groundwork for evaluating the effects of a project on the visual environment.

### Regulatory Context

There are no federal and state laws that specifically protect visual resources across the board. There are, however, several important references to visual resources within the context of historic preservation and coastal zone management statutes. The implications of these legal protections are described below.

At the Federal level, the following legislation is relevant to the project:

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 (16 USC 470) states that any federally funded project must "take into account the effect of the undertaking on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register." Under Section 106 regulations [CFR 36 Part 800], criteria of adverse effect include alteration (direct or indirect) of "*any of the characteristics of a historic property that qualify it for inclusion in the National Register in a manner that would diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting...*" This means that where a historic property's physical setting is important, consideration of visual resources is integral to the determination of effects under the Section 106 process.

At the State level, the following legislation is relevant:

The Connecticut Coastal Management Act (CMA) [CGS Sections 22a-90 to 22a-112, amended to Secs. 22a-97 to 22a-112, inclusive] was enacted in 1979 to protect the public benefits afforded by Connecticut's rich coastal resources. As stated by the Act, "*The coastal area represents an asset of great present and potential value to the economic well-being of the state, and there is a state interest in the effective management, beneficial use, protection and development of the coastal area.*" Visual resources are called out several times in the act as being important to the state's coastal interests. References to protections affirmed by the Act are the following:

- 22a-92a(10): *Reasonable grounds for the restriction or exclusion of a facility or use in the national interest shall include a finding that such a facility or use (which) (C) unreasonably restricts physical or visual access to coastal waters.*
- 22a-92c(1): *Policies concerning development, facilities and uses within the coastal boundary include: (F) to require that new or improved shoreline rail corridors be designed and constructed so as ... (iii) to enhance or not unreasonably impair the visual quality of the shoreline.*
- 22a-93(15): *"Adverse impacts on coastal resources" include: (F) degrading visual quality through significant alteration of the natural features of vistas and view points*

Based on these statutes, visual resources may be afforded some protection at the federal level when those resources are associated with a significant historic property, and at the state level in association with activities in the coastal zone. In terms of the Danbury Branch potential improvements, the provisions of Section 106 will apply to all historic resources (on or eligible for the National Register) in the entire corridor, whereas the provisions of the CMA will apply only to the southern Norwalk portion of the corridor (from Cross Street south), which is the only rail segment in the coastal boundary.

### **Methods, Coordination, and Data Sources**

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) prepared a detailed guidance document for visual impact assessment. While this document is oriented toward impact assessment along highways, the principles for describing the visual environment and the methods for evaluating changes (impacts) are readily applied to other types of transportation projects, including rail projects. Therefore, many of the approaches outlined in the FHWA *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects* (FHWA 1988) were followed for the visual resource evaluation in this DEIS.

Visual characteristics and resources described for the Danbury Branch study corridor were derived primarily from field observations and photographs taken during site walks along the corridor in September and October 2008. Field observations were supplemented by review of aerial photography and topographic mapping.

The evaluation of existing visual resources in the study corridor included consideration of general landscape context as well as specific features of the natural and human-made environments, since all of these aspects combine to form the visual experience. The characterization of the corridor is important for impact analysis, providing a basis to identify visually sensitive areas. Visually sensitive areas can be defined as locations where changes in the visual environment would have the greatest impact on visual quality and/or a community's visual experience.

Since potential project improvements would be restricted to areas directly along the tracks, the existing conditions evaluation concentrated on the landscapes and features that can be seen from the tracks or that have views of the tracks. An area that can be seen from one point is known as a

“viewshed”. The length (distance) of the views from the tracks and the quality of the views change from point to point along the rail line, varying with such factors as tree density, location of clearings, patterns of human development, and general topography. As such, there is no single viewshed for this project. Rather, the visual characteristics and highlights along the rail line were assessed and described as they change along the corridor, by municipality.

## **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **Overview of the Corridor**

The southern end of the study corridor in Norwalk rests in the broad and relatively level coastal plain. In this level urban setting, views from the rail line are dominated by buildings, streets, signage, houses, and backyards, with the closer objects blocking views of the background. The hundreds of properties with frontage along the railroad right-of-way, as well as drivers on local roadways, have direct views of the tracks and passing trains.

Moving northerly, hills and forests begin to encroach on the rail corridor as it runs along the Norwalk River valley in Wilton and Ridgefield and the Umpawaug Pond Brook valley in Redding. There are long stretches where views from one or both sides of the rail corridor are entirely or partially obscured by rock cuts, by hilly topography, or by leafy tree canopies, branches, and shrubs. Scattered homes in the adjacent woods are sometimes visible from the tracks and these have seasonal intermittent views (winter, after leaf fall) of the tracks and trains. Occasional small nodes of commercial and residential development rest directly next to and in view of the tracks. Ponds and water features regularly lie alongside and/or cross the tracks, creating small clearings at track level which allow snapshots of primarily rural forest scenery.

The rail corridor through Bethel runs through forested ridges at the south end before the terrain broadens out into a wider valley floor. When not obscured by trees and adjacent industrial and commercial buildings of various ages, trackside views to the north and south reveal taller forested hills in the background. Farther north, the level broad terrain through much of the Danbury corridor has been developed, so views from the tracks are dominated by buildings, houses, roadways, parking lots, cars, and localized patchy vegetation. Here, like in Norwalk, a multitude of properties, as well as drivers on nearby roads, have direct visual exposure to the rail line and passing trains.

More northerly still, the rail line through Brookfield and the southern portion of New Milford lies along the relatively narrow Still River valley floor, constricted by ridges on both sides. Views from the tracks are predominantly enclosed by trees, with intermittently visible residences, industrial sites, and nodes of commercial development. The residents, owners, and employees of these properties have close-up or screened views of the tracks, depending on their location. Occasionally, views over long stretches of tracks or water features include a glimpse of the high ridges surrounding the valley.

Where the rail corridor meets the Housatonic River valley in New Milford, the broad level valley floor with large cleared acreages allows for several panoramic views of the meandering river and forested ridges to the east and west. However, the landscape is very diverse in New Milford,

offering sections cloaked by trees as well as sections adjacent to downtown residential and commercial buildings. In downtown New Milford, dozens of properties and drivers along local roads have visual exposure to the rail line.

The visual characteristics of the municipalities in the corridor are described in detail below. Where visual characteristics are relatively consistent along a contiguous segment of rail, the descriptions are presented by segment. Representative photographs showing these characteristics are presented on the attached maps. The subjects of the photographs are described in Table X1.

## Norwalk

### *South Norwalk Station to I-95*

From the South Norwalk rail station northerly to I-95, the landscape along the rail line is consistently of an industrial urbanized character on level terrain. Assorted large-scale buildings of various shapes and materials sit at various angles to the rail line, on lots that are cleared for equipment storage and parking lots, with minimal landscaped edges. Despite the proximity of the tracks to the broad Norwalk River estuary (Norwalk Harbor) to the east, there are only occasional glimpses of the water, between or behind buildings. West of the rail line are smaller-scale shopping and office plazas occasionally punctuated by an undeveloped treed patch or grassy lot.

The tracks wind through this fabric of the urban landscape, at times squeezing between large industrial buildings, next to expansive parking lots, or along smaller single-lot businesses. Visual features include flat walls of boxy buildings surrounded by pavement, storage tanks, parking lots and parked cars, clumps of trees, and scraped earth. The elevated bridge abutments and ramps of I-95 create a shadowed concrete space, with graffiti on the walls, where they pass over the tracks. There is a high level of visual diversity with minimal repetition of patterns.

Site-specific visual resources in this stretch are the rail bridge spanning Main Street and Washington Street and individual buildings within the South Main and Washington Street historic district, occasionally visible from the rail.

### *I-95 to Cross Street*

Just north of I-95, the historic Pine Island Cemetery is visible along Crescent Street west of the rail line. This quiet patch of green with its old small gravestones is one of the few intact undeveloped properties in Norwalk, contrasting with the highway infrastructure and large cleared industrial and institutional lots around it. Views along the tracks continue to feature industrial buildings and storage yards to the east, while smaller commercial and residential buildings appear on the west. Despite the proximity of the line to the Norwalk River, views of the river are obstructed in most places by buildings and fences. Within the northern portion of this stretch, the tracks travel directly next to residential buildings and row houses, which dominate views. There are a few views down streets lined with houses, commercial buildings, parallel parking, and

occasional trees. Views from the rail bridge over the Norwalk River between Burnell Boulevard and Cross Street include a very quick glimpse of the river's narrow tree-lined channel.

#### *Cross Street to Route 15*

North of Cross Street, closely-spaced houses on similarly-sized lots form a unified row of houses, trees, and back yards on both sides of the tracks. In the vicinity of Grand Avenue and the at-grade rail crossing of New Canaan Avenue, the landscape is once more dominated by variable and large-scale buildings and features such as box stores, parking lots, and some commercial buildings elongated along the tracks. This mixed urban matrix extends northerly to the Route 15 (Merritt Parkway) crossing. Just south of Broad Street on the west side of the tracks lies the green space of St. Mary's Cemetery, providing a soothing stretch of green amid the harder urban surfaces.

Just south of the Route 15 highway bridge, the rail line affords another few quick glimpses of the Norwalk River, as it snakes close to the tracks and the tracks cross it. The short section along the river here is one of the few in Norwalk where the rail line is enclosed by trees on both sides.

#### *Route 15 to the Norwalk-Wilton Line*

From Route 15 north to Grist Mill Road, the rail line passes through a landscape with multi-story modern concrete and glass office towers of various geometric shapes on both sides of the track. The Merritt 7 Station is located in this stretch. There are also some curving rows of low-slung condominium buildings and periodic windowless warehouse structures. From Grist Mill Road north to the Wilton town line, the only large swath of undeveloped land in Norwalk occurs on the west side of the tracks, where dense deciduous forest abuts the rail line. However, the immediate view from the rail line includes a cleared swath where metal high-voltage power poles and lines lie parallel to the west side of the tracks, all the way into Wilton. Views toward the east side of the tracks include the tree-fringed embankment of the Norwalk River and large industrial buildings and parking lots straddling the Norwalk-Wilton town line.

### Wilton

#### *Wilton-Norwalk Line to Wolf Pit Road*

The southernmost segment of the Wilton study corridor is characterized by extensive unbroken forest on the west side of the tracks and periodic views of industrial lots and storage yards on the east side of the tracks. Two large ponds, one on each side of the tracks, provide visual interest between milepost (MP) 5.5 and 6. Trees enclose the tracks on both sides for much of the way; however, the power poles and powerlines in the utility corridor running parallel to the tracks are almost always visible. The powerlines run on the west side of the tracks from the Wilton-Norwalk town line to Kent Road, and then cross to the east side for the remainder of this stretch. Just south of Wolf Pit Road, houses on large lots occasionally punctuate the solid forest cover. When leaves are on the trees during the growing season, these are largely cloaked by the trees,

but may be partly visible when leaves have fallen. Views of the rail from these houses would similarly be seasonal.

#### *Wolf Pit Road to Wilton Station*

This section provides a combination of enclosed forest views, glimpses of the Norwalk River which meanders directly next to the tracks through much of this stretch, and periodic views through trees of adjacent residential areas, which include condominium complexes, houses set in the trees, and houses in grassy yards. Although the meanders of the Norwalk River are close to the rail line, the channel is narrow, perched below the rail line, and surrounded by trees. As such, it is difficult to see much of the river from the rail when foliage is present.

A rare view of an open meadow within woods is visible along the west side of the tracks south of the southern terminus of Old Ridgefield Road (south of MP 7.0). The slightly more open tree cover through this area allows views to and from the tracks of some mixed commercial and office buildings on the east side of the tracks. There are also views of the river on both sides of the tracks nearby, as the rail crosses the river near MP 6.6.

The tree cover similarly screens views across the river to the commercial cluster in the Ridgefield Road area south of Wilton Station, west of the tracks and the Norwalk River. After leaf fall, views of the river and views to and from the parking areas and cluster of small buildings would be more available. These views would include glimpses of regularly spaced commercial buildings with roofs of various colors, geometries, and textures, with associated parking lots and cars, seen through a mesh of tree branches.

At the Wilton Station, the station parking lot abuts the rail line. This allows an open view from the tracks of the neatly laid out parking area and an adjacent office building in a landscaped setting.

Powerlines continue to be visible along the tracks in this segment. Views up and down the tracks include regularly-spaced wooden poles along the edge of the railroad ballast, as well as the tall metal superstructures for higher voltage lines, offset to the side of the tracks in a cleared grassy path.

#### *Wilton Station to Cannondale Station*

Between the two existing Danbury Branch Line stations in Wilton, the rail line is once again enclosed by a heavily wooded setting, where trees and the varying wetland vegetation along the meanders of the Norwalk River provide a lush and seasonally verdant canopy. Several ponds lie directly next to the tracks, offering views of open water bordered by trees. Intermittently, the shimmering water of the Norwalk River is visible through the trees where the river meanders very close to the tracks. The best view of the river in this stretch is where it flows under the railroad bridge just south of the Cannondale Station. Along the tracks, the powerline poles of the two different systems (the wooden poles and the metal superstructures) continue to occur in view.

Within this section, there are more visible elements of the rural residential landscape, as the two-lane Pimpewaug Road is intermittently visible along the east side of the tracks for half a mile and occasionally one of the houses along it. Within a wooded section of tracks in this segment, Route 7 crosses over the tracks (near MP 8.0). Views of the large-acreage school and recreational facilities located along Route 7 north of the crossing, and west of the tracks, are generally well screened by trees. During winter, views to and from those facilities would be more open but still partially screened by tree stems and branches.

The Cannondale Station is located within a cluster of historic buildings which are visible from the tracks and from which the tracks can be seen. This intimate village setting contains several 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings, including the Cannondale Station itself. The buildings are close to the rail line and intermingled with trees, so views do not extend far. However, historic houses, an old schoolhouse, and railroad buildings can be seen in variable directions from the at-grade rail crossing of Cannon Road. The older wooden and more recent metal powerline poles continue to parallel the rail line and are very visible as they dissect the village. In this setting, these modern elements are out of scale and character with the diminutive wooden historic buildings, creating a visual discord within this otherwise intact landscape.

#### *Cannondale Station to the Wilton-Redding and Wilton-Ridgefield Lines*

The northernmost section of the Wilton study corridor is the most heavily wooded, enclosing the tracks with “walls” of trees. While not obvious from the rail line, the terrain becomes more rugged with steeper hills. Rural roads cross the tracks with at-grade crossings in several places, and Mather Street (Mill Road) runs along the east side of the tracks for over a mile, visible even when trees have foliage. Observers from the tracks can see the rural two-lane roadway, passing cars, and, more rarely, houses nestled within trees. At several locations, houses directly front the road and therefore are fully exposed to the tracks.

Like in most of Wilton, the powerlines continue to be visible from the tracks through this section. Views of the Norwalk River are few and far between, as the river meanders within, and is screened by, a heavily forested terrain. Other features viewed occasionally include disturbed or excavated clearings and residential yards.

The rail line swings into Redding near MP 11.6 but re-enters Wilton near MP 12.2 for approximately ½ mile before entering Ridgefield. This section crosses the west end of Factory Pond before continuing north, sandwiched between Route 7 and the Portland Avenue. Views from the tree-fringed rail line are dominated by the pavement of these parallel roads, with a mix of house and commercial building shapes and colors dotting the background.

#### Redding

##### *Georgetown*

Where the rail line enters Redding from Wilton at the town’s southwest corner, features of the built environment and Connecticut’s manufacturing history begin to appear. Small residential

structures can be seen intermittently through a screen of trees west of the tracks, while the large cleared development pad of the former Gilbert and Bennett Wire Factory opens up to the east. The series of vacant four to five story brick factory buildings are visible within a cleared concrete and earthen pad, with areas of standing water. While the buildings remind the viewers of a long-gone industrial past, human activity of construction and site clean-up equipment, as well as cars on North Main Street, remind them of the present. The large Factory Pond is shielded from view by trees around its southern side, visible from the tracks only at the Redding-Ridgefield line.

### *Redding-Ridgefield Line to Redding-Bethel Line*

As the rail corridor swings into Redding, from Ridgefield, it lies along the west side of Route 7. The tracks are elevated above the roadway here, enabling views through light tree foliage of the road and the facades of commercial and office buildings with their parking lots beyond. Trees overhang the rail line on the eastern slope. Other than this commercial strip and the small node of modern commercial buildings amidst pavement near the Redding Station, the rail corridor through this long remaining stretch of Redding is heavily forested with occasional views of historic homes, ponds, and wetlands.

The dense forests along the tracks create long stretches of homogeneous landscape from the track, essentially “walls” of trees. Houses are occasionally visible through the dense trees where roads cross the tracks or run directly along the tracks. The major parallel roadway is Simpaug Turnpike; homes and yards along this route are periodically visible. Other visible houses are located near the Old Redding Road and Topstone Road crossings, and along Topledge Road. Many of the homes are well preserved 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century houses of clapboard façade, providing visually appealing glimpses of rural New England architecture in wooded surrounds.

Within the wooded backdrop, the natural environment provides other features of visual interest and splendor. Where open water or low scrubby wetland vegetation abuts the tracks, views open up, providing slightly longer views of naturalistic rural scenery. Primary locations with such views include Umpawaug Pond (near MP 15.5), which is bordered by low wetland shrubs, trees and several homes with boat docks, and Bogus Mountain Brook (near MP 17.6), which broadens out into an expansive open wetland west of the tracks. In these areas, the naturalistic blending of textures, heights and shapes of trees and wetland plants provides appealing landscapes with seasonal color.

There is another node of development near Redding Station, where Sidecut Road and Simpaug Turnpike from the east meet Long Ridge Road from the west, at the tracks. Cleared paved properties with modern two-story buildings and housing commercial uses are visible from the tracks on both sides.

### Ridgefield

There are two Ridgefield segments in the corridor. One is a stretch of approximately 0.8 miles where the tracks run through the Branchville section of Ridgefield, just north of the Ridgefield-

Wilton town line. The other segment is a wooded residential area partially within the corridor west of Redding near MP 15, in the Topstone Road vicinity. The scattered houses in their densely wooded setting are essentially obscured by the forests and the houses in Redding directly along the tracks. During winter, when foliage has dropped, some of these Ridgefield houses may be partially visible through the trees here, and residents may be able to see passing trains.

Within the Branchville section of Ridgefield, the rail line runs between Route 7 (Ethan Allen Highway) to the west and West Branchville Road to the east. The track is fringed by trees on both sides much of the way, with clearings along the track for the Branchville Station parking lot, allowing good views of the historic Branchville Station building. Historic wooded clapboard and shingle structures of historic Branchville are visible at various points along the way, including some perched above the tracks along West Branchville Road, with windows looking down on the tracks. The varying colors, rooflines, and architectural styles add visual interest and historic overtones to this closely clustered neighborhood.

North of the historic cluster, the setting changes rapidly as the next visible buildings are large flat-topped industrial buildings on cleared paved lots, one on each side of the tracks. Then, dense forests encroach upon the tracks, to the west occurring along the Norwalk River and to the east on the steep undeveloped slopes, as the line exits Ridgefield and enters Redding.

## Bethel

### *Bethel-Redding Line to Taylor Avenue*

The undeveloped blocks of dense forest at the south end of the Bethel study corridor make for a long stretch of views enclosed by trees. Views to the south, directly down the long straight stretch of cleared track in this segment, reveal a tall forested hill. After 1/3 mile of unbroken forest, the tree cover is broken by a clearing on the east side of the tracks, where a quarry with piles of earth material and an industrial building are in close view.

While forested slopes continue to dominate views on the west side of the tracks, north of the quarry the landscape remains open, as Sympaug Pond lies along the east side of the tracks. There are clear views of open water and shrubby wetland plants of different heights and textures. From the northern end of the pond (near MP 19) to Taylor Avenue in downtown Bethel, the still-extensive stretches of wooded scenery are occasionally punctuated by clearings where large square, light-colored and often metallic industrial buildings appear. Near Turkey Plain Road, the higher cleared slopes of a cemetery, with hilltop grave sites, are visible to the northeast of the railroad crossing of this road. To the west are a few buildings and houses with backyards along the tracks, partially obscured (seasonally) by trees. A steep heavily wooded slope on the east side of the rail is opposed by an extensive red maple swamp west of the tracks, providing a dense natural forest patch along the tracks, with seasonal color.

Closer to Bethel, near MP 20, industrial buildings and clearings dominate the views. There are several large boxy buildings lined up along west side of tracks, with smaller older rectangular and hangar-style buildings on the east side. Where the industrial buildings back up to the tracks,

their sides look like bright reflective walls. A mix of commercial and industrial buildings and storage yards abut the tracks northerly to the vicinity of Taylor Avenue. Views north along the path of the cleared track include a tall hill in the background, seemingly hovering over the buildings of downtown Bethel.

#### *Taylor Avenue to Bethel-Danbury Line*

Through downtown Bethel, from approximately Taylor Avenue to Greenwood Avenue and Diamond Avenue, the views from the track consist of very diverse assemblages of buildings on streets running at variable angles to the tracks. Buildings are a mix of old and new, including distinctly historic wooden houses and commercial buildings. Although a relatively diverse mix of colors, styles and eras, this downtown core is visually unified by similar-scale buildings of one and two stories and a closely-spaced street grid. An occasional strip of trees helps blend some of the contrasting shapes and colors. The predominantly low-slung buildings allow views of forested hills to the northeast, which impart a rural feeling to the bustling downtown.

Trees fringe the corridor slightly north of Greenwood Avenue, partially shielding the large warehouse building south of the Bethel Station, the station and its parking lot. From the station north to the Danbury line, views from the tracks are dominated by trees, including large blocks of red maple that provide seasonal color. There is a cleared grassy path along the tracks on the east side.

### Danbury

#### *Danbury-Bethel Line to Triangle Street*

Near the Bethel Line, views on the east side of the tracks are dominated by dense woods and wetlands along the Still River, the only such view in Danbury. Trees border the east side of the tracks northerly almost to Shelter Rock Road, partly shielding the large cleared industrial parking and storage lot south of Great Pasture Road.

The remainder of this stretch is characterized by level terrain and views of industrial sized storage lots and buildings right up to the edge of the rail right-of-way. Views include the walls of large industrial buildings, open pavement, piles of stored materials, storage containers, and parked cars, with an occasional landscaping tree or brushy edge. The narrow vegetated strip at the Still River crossing north of Shelter Rocks Road (near MP 22.4) provides a brief naturalistic view, north of which a partially obscured junk yard to the east and an electrical transfer station to the west dominate the views, just south of Triangle Street.

#### *Triangle Street to White Street*

North of Triangle Street, the railroad corridor loops to the west and then back along the same parallel path to the east. This loop intersects some of the densely developed residential areas of downtown Danbury. While there are some larger clearings for railroad and industrial uses along the tracks, the buildings are smaller and there are views of one or more houses from most locations. There are several at-grade crossings in this section, affording views of homes lined up

on narrow streets, with small lawns and driveways, with occasional trees. Visible rows of homes are along Wildman, East Liberty, Chestnut, and Chapelle Streets.

Near the west end of the loop is Danbury Station, where the rail transportation facilities dominate the near view, with the commuter parking lot, spur rail tracks and cleared land for freight handling. Views south of the Danbury Station include a row of houses facing the tracks from a visible elevated position along Pahquioque Avenue, providing a neighborhood quality to the vicinity. The Still River parallels the track here but is channeled underground in most of this section. Where it surfaces briefly near Patriot Drive, it flows through concrete channels and does not stand out within the surrounding urban backdrop. A visual highlight in this vicinity is the former Union Station built in 1903, restored and now serving as the Danbury Railway Museum, located at the northwest corner of the rail loop.

#### *White Street to Danbury-Brookfield Line*

East of the White Street rail crossing, the visual character along the rail line is very commercial and industrial in nature. Closely and regularly spaced metal and masonry flat-topped buildings dominate the views along the tracks, with debris and brushy growth at ground level. Fences of various types and yards with equipment storage are also visible. Small patches of scraggly shrub and tree growth occasionally occur, with dirt paths, earth mounds and other signs of human disturbance.

In the vicinity of I-84, larger pads with newer large retail buildings and box stores dominate the views, with greater visibility of large parking lots. An abrupt transition into a wooded naturalistic setting occurs where the rail line crosses the Still River approximately 1/3 mile north of I-84, near MP 26.6. The natural channel fringed by trees is visible from the crossing, north of which lower wetland shrubs line both sides of the tracks. Through openings in the shrub cover and above the level of the shrubs, views include White Turkey Road to the west and a sloping hill with mixed fields, condominiums, and disturbed ground to the west. A mix of tall shrub and tree growth, side slope cuts, and roadway infrastructure along and over the tracks characterizes the visual environment of the remaining short stretch to the Brookfield town line.

#### Brookfield

##### *Brookfield-Danbury Line to Silvermine Road*

The southern end of the rail line in Brookfield, near the Danbury line, has views of solid vegetation on both sides. The gentle slopes above the tracks on the east side have taller trees while the level west side has shorter shrubs and trees. Within half a mile of the town line, large flat roofs of industrial buildings with surrounding earth clearings, scrap yards, and an occasional pond punctuate the wooded backdrop. A powerline corridor transects the rail corridor in this location. Just north of Sand Cut Road, the tracks are enveloped by thick stands of tall trees that enclose the views. The few homes within the corridor along Stoney Hill Road are shielded from view.

As the tracks cross under Gray's Bridge Road and continue north, a buffer of trees along the tracks screens the regularly spaced boxy commercial buildings on the west side of the tracks, which have frontage on the parallel Commerce Road. After leaf fall in winter, the buildings, on level with the tracks, would be visible through the matrix of tree stems. Views of trees on both sides of the tracks continue northerly to Junction Road.

From Junction Road to Silvermine Road, a similar pattern of commercial-office buildings to the west and forested buffer to the east occurs. In this case, the tracks are slightly elevated above Pocono Road, which parallels the tracks on the west. The slope between the tracks and Pocono Road has been partially cleared for the purposes of gas pipeline installation. The clearing has allowed relatively open views from several locations along the tracks to the driveways, buildings and parking areas cut into trees below Pocono Road. Passing trains and the tracks are visible from various locations on these properties, and from all along Pocono Road. Woods along the east side of the tracks provide a forested wall on that side, with an occasional glimpse of one of the few houses located near the tracks.

#### *Silvermine Road to Whisconier Road*

The rail corridor between Silvermine Road and Whisconier Road has a very consistent visual character. The track is enclosed by trees the entire way. Residential homes on large lots are scattered in trees on both sides of the corridor. The tracks are visible through trees from the back yards of many of these homes, which are located off Pocono Road to the west and off Oak Grove Road, Oak Lane, Brookfield Meadows, and Whisconier Road to the east. Likewise, back yards, sheds, and some houses are intermittently visible from the tracks, particularly after autumn leaf drop.

#### *Whisconier Road to the Brookfield-New Milford Line*

This northernmost rail segment in Brookfield is also characterized by trees on both sides of the tracks and scattered homes intermittently visible through woods, but includes a small historic node and a powerline corridor. Just northwest of the Whisconier Road crossing of the rail line, a cluster of several 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings is partially visible from the tracks, including the old Brookfield railroad station. At the same vicinity, contrasting with this quaint scene of earlier rural life, a major powerline crosses Whisconier Road and the tracks from the southwest to the northeast. The tall metal structures are visible overhead and off to the east of the tracks. Moving north along the tracks, the dense adjacent trees shield views of the powerlines for a short way, then the powerline corridor crosses to the west of the tracks and the brushy cleared powerline swath and poles, parallel to the tracks, remain dominant visual features through a narrow line of trees at the edge of tracks.

Just south of the Brookfield-New Milford town line, the powerline corridor veers east, crossing the tracks again and departing from the corridor. At this point, Old Middle Road meets the east side of the tracks and runs along it to the New Milford town line. Views from the tracks in this area include this two-lane rural road and an occasional back yard and house behind the stems and leaves of trees to the east. Rolling forested hills can sometimes be seen in the background when

looking across wide clearings, such as down the railroad tracks and across the powerline corridor clearings.

### New Milford

#### *New Milford-Brookfield Line to Still River Drive*

The visual character of the rail corridor in the south end of New Milford is very rural. North of a shop-garage building against the west side of the tracks northwest of the Old Middle Road crossing, views from the tracks are a mosaic of woods, farm fields, wetlands and hills, with an occasional farm building. A very light fringe of trees along the east side of the tracks frames long views of the nearby hillsides. A powerline system parallels the tracks within fields and forest at the outer limits of the study corridor. Because the visually rich hillsides rise above the powerlines, the landscape features dominate rather than the utility elements. Open views of the few hillside buildings means that those residents also have good views of the tracks.

To the west, the meanders of the Still River are mostly cloaked by vegetation, but areas with low and broad grassy meadows allow brief glimpses of the glimmering water beyond. The variety of meadow, shrubs, and trees of different shapes and seasonal colors render this area a naturalistic visual highlight in the corridor.

North of Old Pumpkin Hill Road, where the rail corridor runs between Erickson Road and June Road, there are near views of houses and backyards to the east, where a small residential development was recently built close to the tracks, and a couple of garage-type structures to the west, near the Cross Road-Erickson Road junction, which back up to the rail right-of-way, breaking up the otherwise rural-natural setting.

There is a brief view down a cleared powerline corridor as it transects the rail corridor in the dense woods just north of these structures. From here northerly, trees enclose the tracks but periodic clearings reveal houses and yards, primarily on the east side of the tracks, where Turkey Trout Road and Erickson Road lie close to the rail line. West of the tracks, the turf and greens of the Candlewood Valley Country Club are intermittently visible among the meanders and natural meadows of the Still River, with clearer views in winter (after leaf drop).

Near Still River Drive and the old Lanesville Road bridge over the Still River, the river lies very close to the tracks to the west. Dense vegetation obscures views during the growing season, but after leaf drop, the river and wooded residential setting beyond would be momentarily visible from a passing train.

#### *Still River Drive to Anderson Avenue*

North of Still River Drive, the Still River pools up along the west side of the tracks, before it passes east under the rail bridge (near MP 35.9), while the Housatonic River approaches the rails from the east. Interesting views of water enclosed by trees on the west side and long views over the Housatonic River on the east side provide visual highlights. Just north of the Still River

crossing, the landscape character changes, as the tracks lie within the broad level valley terrain of the Housatonic River. Historically cleared for farming and still not forested, cleared lands on both sides of the tracks allow more expansive views, particularly up and down the river.

As the rail corridor parallels Pickett District Road, which lies to the west, the land uses between the road and the tracks come into the foreground view. Views include recreational baseball fields and a stretch of large industrial sites with rectangular flat-topped buildings, rows of truck containers, and vast paved areas for vehicle and container parking. Interspersed are some open parcels with maintained and/or overgrown fields. Several rail spurs run from the tracks into these properties. Just south of the railroad bridge over the Housatonic River, the rail corridor bisects facilities associated with a waste water treatment plant, with small outbuildings, cylindrical structures, and treatment ponds visible from the tracks.

The railroad bridge over the Housatonic River (near MP 37.1) is the longest water crossing in the study corridor. Dramatic views of the river are seen from the tracks. Views of the bridge from the river shoreline are also impressive, as the structure is architecturally and historically outstanding. The large brick commercial-office building at the West Cove Marina on West Street visually anchors the northern shore of the river on the west side of the tracks. With its cleared river edge and wide parking lot, it becomes a visual focal point from the south side of the river. This site, across the tracks from Anderson Avenue, demarks the southern entrance of the rail corridor into downtown New Milford.

#### *Anderson Avenue to Northern Terminus of Study Corridor*

From Anderson Avenue to the northern end of the study corridor, the tracks run through the historic civic and commercial center of New Milford. Streets lined with homes and commercial structures occur on both sides of the tracks. Some of the commercial buildings are oriented lengthwise along the rail right-of-way, forming long walls. Closely spaced buildings of one and two stories are visible from the tracks, interspersed with trees and parking lots. The buildings next to the tracks block views of the tracks and trains from streets and properties that are farther away, but there are intermittent views of adjacent buildings over empty lots and cleared parking areas. Many of the visible structures are historic buildings with architectural detail and interest, including the Housatonic Railroad station on Railroad Street west of the tracks.

North of Bridge Street, the streetscapes of downtown continue on the east side of the tracks, transitioning to larger-lot homes with more trees and green space northerly along Housatonic Avenue. To the west are views of broader cleared and or disturbed lands, including recreational fields, public works grounds, and storage yards, positioned slightly lower than the tracks. Where the rail line crosses the West Aspetuck River, it passes briefly into a forested corridor. Houses near Culvert City Road have a close view of the forested rail embankment, passing trains, and the graceful rock arch railroad bridge spanning the river.

**Table 1:** Descriptions of Photographs on Figures 1 to 14

<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Photo Number</b>	<b>Description</b>
Norwalk	1	South Norwalk Station from Chestnut Street
Norwalk	2	Marshall Street railroad bridge
Norwalk	3	Brick row houses along tracks on Commerce Street
Norwalk	4	Industrial building and site along Norwalk River
Norwalk	5	At-grade rail crossing of Catherine Street
Norwalk	6	St Mary's cemetery from Broad Street at-grade crossing
Norwalk	7	View to south along tracks, Norwalk River (and waterfalls) below to the right
Norwalk	8	Office buildings located near Merritt Station
Norwalk	9	Tree fringe and powerlines north of Grist Mill Road, west side of tracks
Wilton	1	View of industrial buildings and powerlines along tracks
Wilton	2	Pond within naturalistic wooded setting near MP 5.5
Wilton	3	View across pond at condominium development
Wilton	4	Cleared lawns and buildings near MP 6.8
Wilton	5	Tracks and Route 7 embankment, south of Wilton Station
Wilton	6	Rail bridge over the Norwalk River south of Cannondale
Wilton	7	Approaching Cannondale Station from the south
Wilton	8	Cannondale village looking southwest from Cannondale station
Wilton	9	Norwalk River flowing along foot of the steep railroad embankment near MP 10
Wilton	10	Historic home on Mather Street across from tracks near MP 10.9
Wilton	11	Residential features within woods along Mill Road near MP 10.4
Ridgefield	1	View of Branchville vicinity south of Branchville Station
Redding	1	View of former Gilbert & Bennett Wire Factory site in Georgetown
Redding	2	North end of Factory Pond framed by woods
Redding	3	Tracks perched on embankment above Route 7
Redding	4	View along tracks enclosed by trees and rock-cut slopes
Redding	5	Historic residence along rail at Topstone Road at-grade crossing
Redding	6	View of Umpawaug Pond through fringe of trees
Redding	7	View along tracks near Simpaug Turnpike bridge
Redding	8	Woods along tracks at Redding Station
Redding	9	Flooded wetlands along Bogus Mountain Brook, west side of tracks
Redding	10	Views to south along tracks, hills visible in distance
Bethel	1	Sympaug Pond along tracks
Bethel	2	Row of industrial buildings along tracks

Bethel	3	View of South Street and old Bethel depot, hill to north in background
Bethel	4	View to south from Bethel Station
Bethel	5	View to north from Bethel Station
Danbury	1	View of Danbury from Danbury-Bethel line
Danbury	2	Still River crossing near MP 22.4
Danbury	3	At-grade rail crossing of East Liberty Street (on south) becoming Chestnut Street (on north)
Danbury	4	Looking south from Danbury Station, residences visible in background
Danbury	5	Historic Danbury station, now the Danbury Railway Museum
Danbury	6	Rail bridge over Still River near MP 26.6
Danbury	7	View of White Turkey Plain Road on west side of tracks
Brookfield	1	Industrial site and pond near MP 27.2
Brookfield	2	Slope along west side of rail near MP 29.6, with Pocono Road and building driveways in background
Brookfield	3	Looking north from Silvermine Road bridge over tracks
Brookfield	4	Home visually shielded by seasonal vegetation, near MP 31
Brookfield	5	Looking north from Whisconier Road, old rail station on left (west)
Brookfield	6	View north along tracks and powerline swath, near MP 29.8
Brookfield	7	View west from tracks near MP 32.7; powerline clearing allows view of ridge
New Milford	1	View to west along Aldridge Road near MP 33
New Milford	2	View south from Old Pumpkin Hill Road bridge over tracks
New Milford	3	View of level terrain and trees north of Erickson Road crossing of tracks, near MP 34.9
New Milford	4	Tracks through trees, south of Lanesville Road near MP 35.5
New Milford	5	Still River along west side of tracks near MP 35.9
New Milford	6	Long views north along Housatonic River, east side of tracks near MP 35.9
New Milford	7	Looking north over Housatonic River Railroad Bridge (MP 37.1)
New Milford	8	View to west over tracks from end of Anderson Avenue
New Milford	9	Looking south from at-grade rail crossing of South Street, historic building to left (east)
New Milford	10	Rock arch railroad bridge over the West Aspetuck River near MP 38.9
New Milford	11	Looking north along Railroad Street from station, downtown New Milford

## REFERENCES

Federal Highway Administration. 1988. *Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects*. Publication No. FHWA-HI-88-054. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration Office of Environmental Policy, Washington D.C.

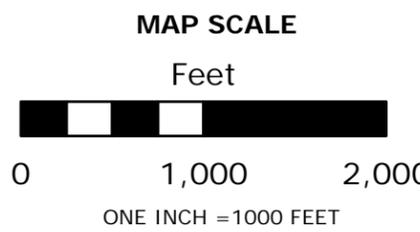


**Legend**

- Railroad Track
- 1000 Foot Study Corridor
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
- Proposed Location of New Railroad Station
- Railroad Milepost Marker
- Railroad Crossing
- Private Railroad Crossing
- Interstate Highway
- US Highway
- State Road
- Local Road
- Rivers/Streams
- Lakes/Ponds

Matchline with Sheet 2

Data Sources:  
 Roads layer: CT DEP  
 RR Track: CT DEP  
 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and  
 Grade Crossings: Metro-North  
 Track Charts



PROJECT TITLE: **DANBURY BRANCH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM & ELECTRIFICATION ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

GIS MAPPING BY: URS CORPORATION      DATE: 02/2009

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
 DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

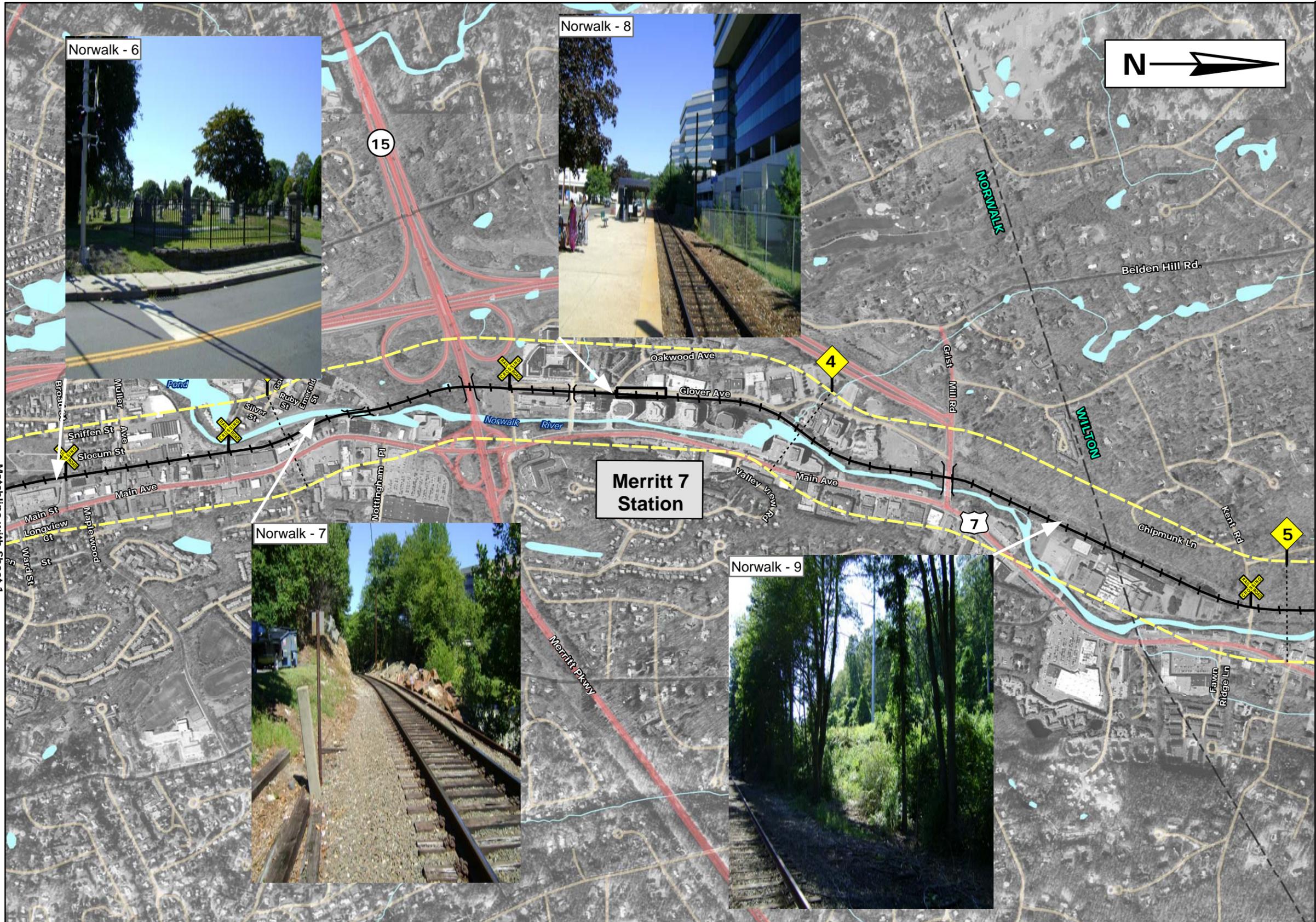
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MAP TITLE: **VISUAL RESOURCES**

PROJECT NO:  
**302-008**

MAP NO:

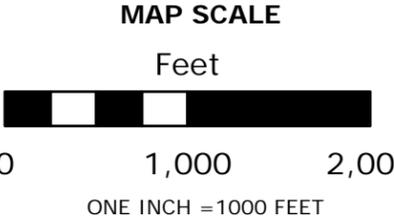
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**1 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
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 Roads layer: CT DEP  
 RR Track: CT DEP  
 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and  
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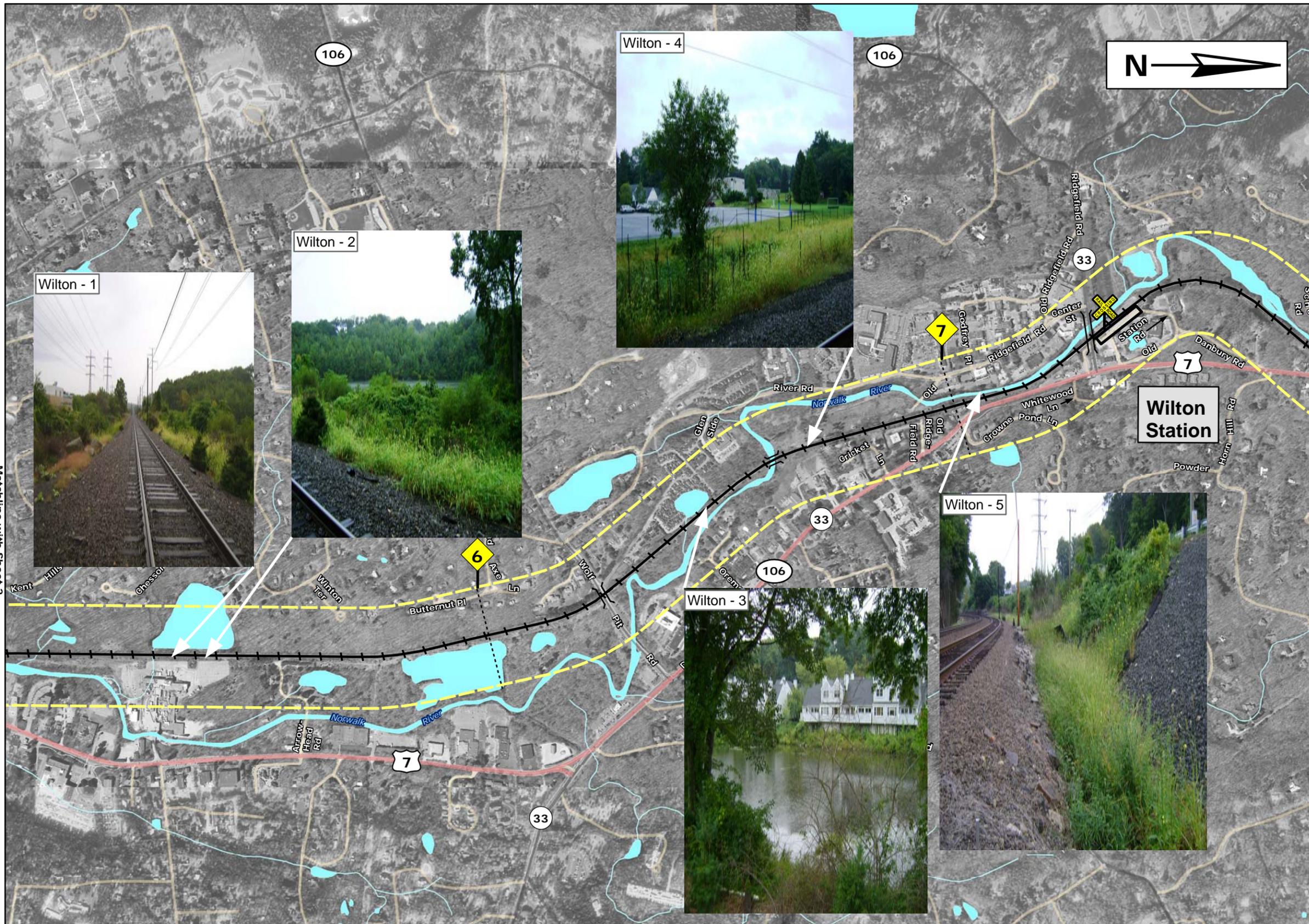
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PROJECT NO: **302-008**

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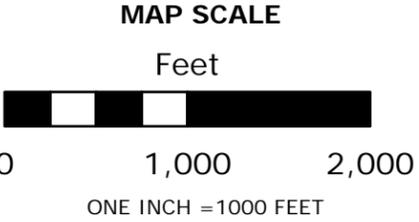
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**Legend**

- Railroad Track
- 1000 Foot Study Corridor
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
- Proposed Location of New Railroad Station
- Railroad Milepost Marker
- Railroad Crossing
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- US Highway
- State Road
- Local Road
- Rivers/Streams
- Lakes/Ponds

Data Sources:  
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 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and  
 Grade Crossings: Metro-North  
 Track Charts



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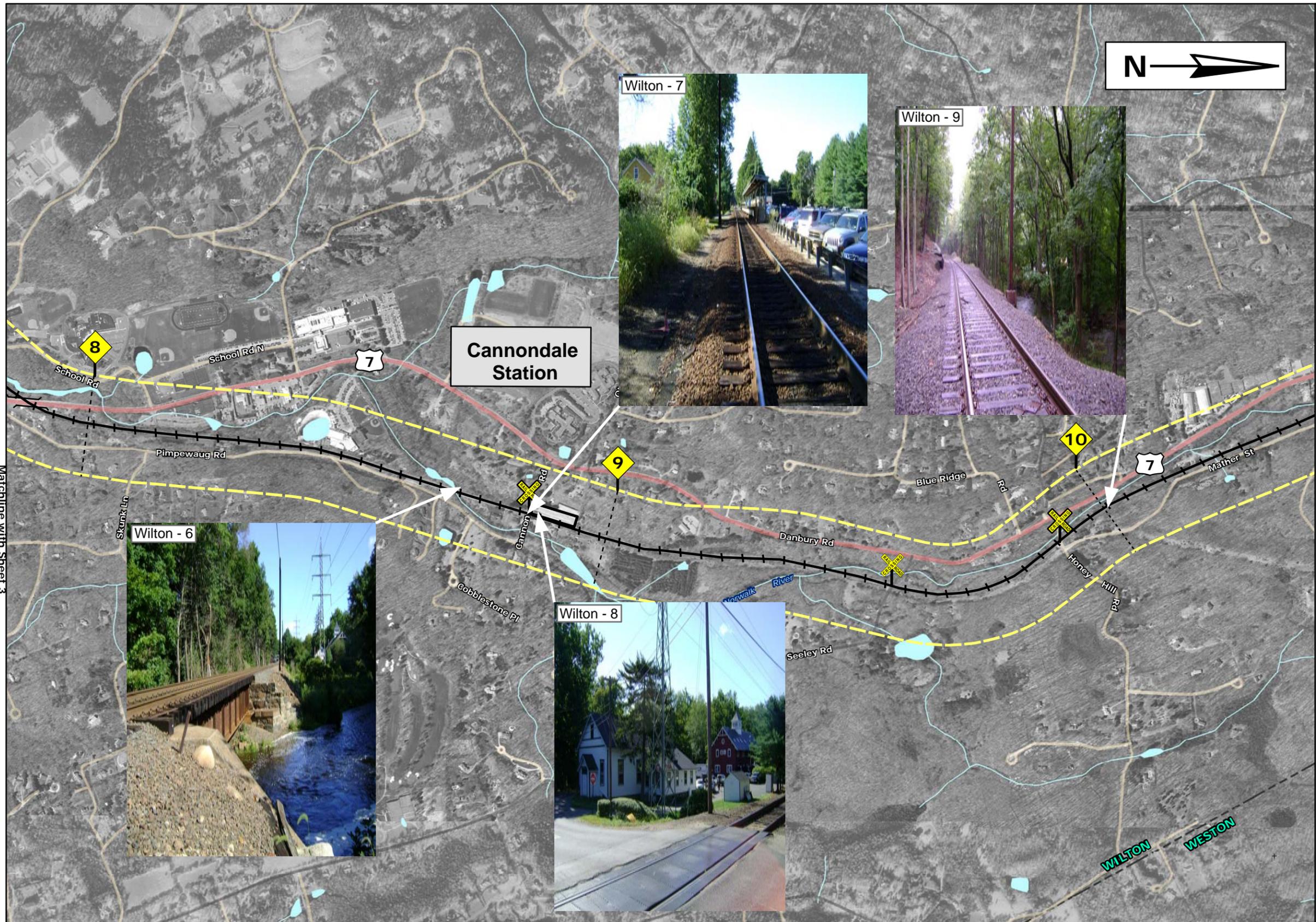
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MAP TITLE: **VISUAL RESOURCES**

PROJECT NO: **302-008**

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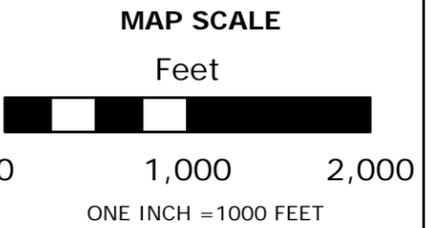
SHEET NO: **3 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
- 1000 Foot Study Corridor
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
- Proposed Location of New Railroad Station
- Railroad Milepost Marker
- Railroad Crossing
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- State Road
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- Lakes/Ponds

Data Sources:  
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 RR Milepost Markers and  
 Grade Crossings: Metro-North  
 Track Charts



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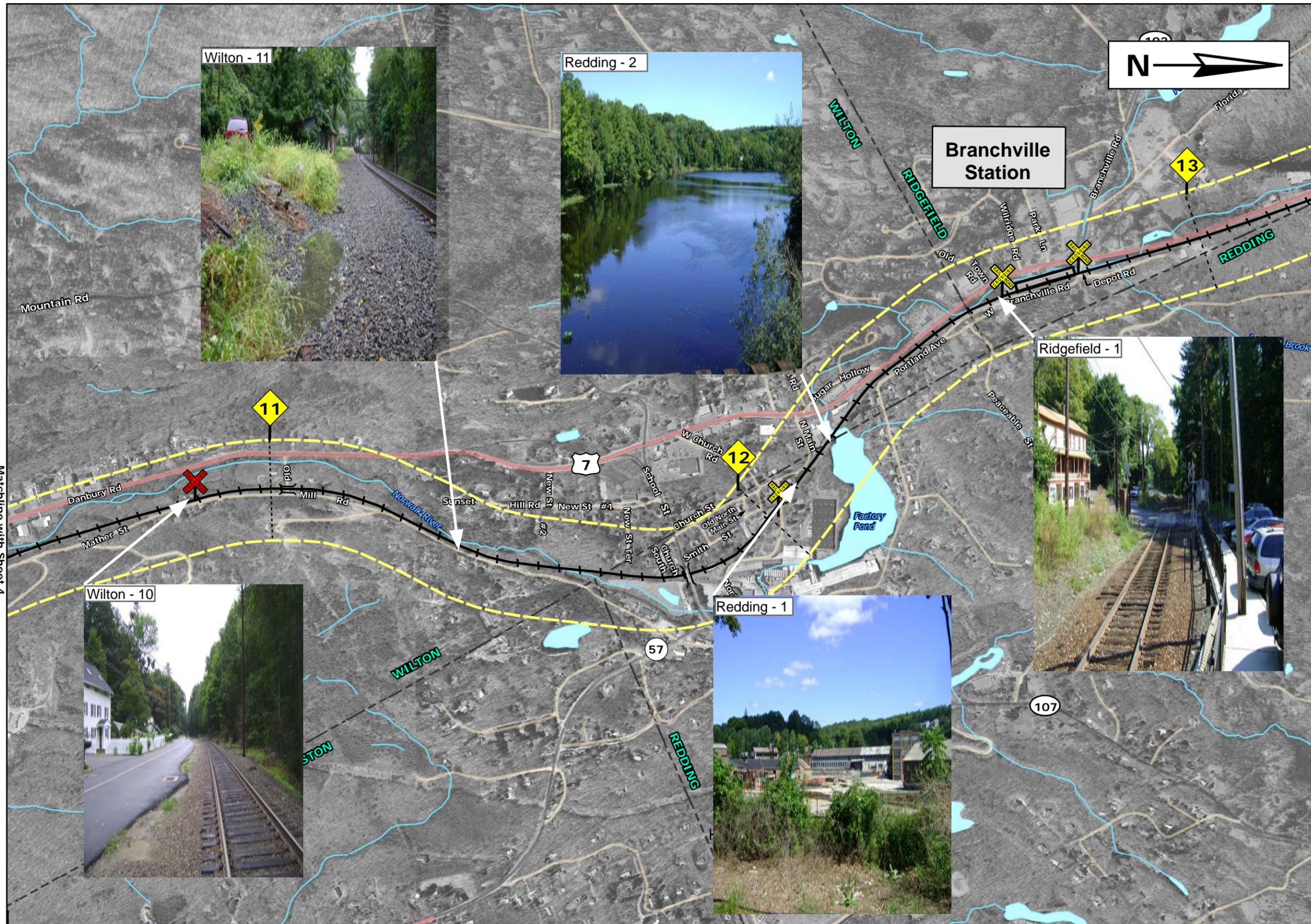
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PROJECT NO:  
**302-008**

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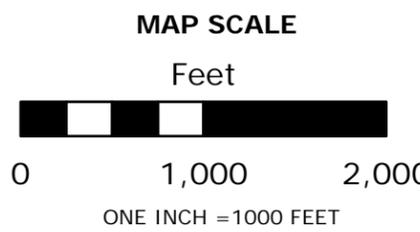
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**4 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
- 1000 Foot Study Corridor
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
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Data Sources:  
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 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and  
 Grade Crossings: Metro-North  
 Track Charts



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**STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

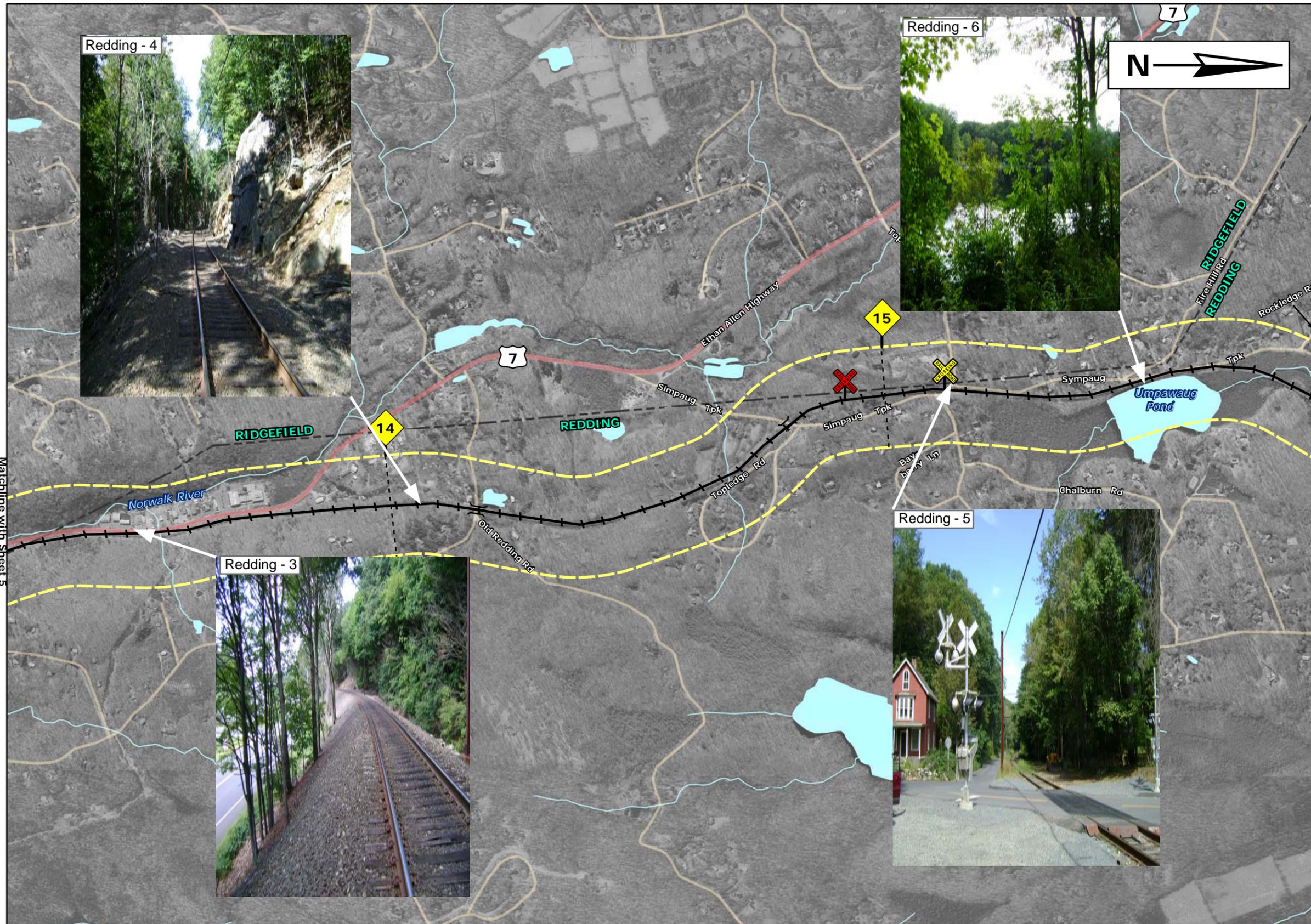
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PROJECT NO: **302-008**

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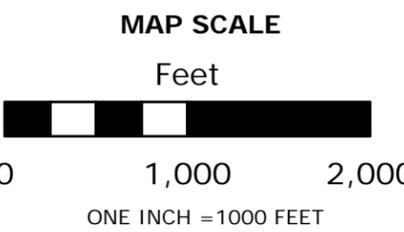
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**Legend**

- Railroad Track
- 1000 Foot Study Corridor
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
- Proposed Location of New Railroad Station
- Railroad Milepost Marker
- Railroad Crossing
- Private Railroad Crossing
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- State Road
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- Rivers/Streams
- Lakes/Ponds

Data Sources:  
 Roads layer: CT DEP  
 RR Track: CT DEP  
 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and Grade Crossings: Metro-North Track Charts



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GIS MAPPING BY: URS CORPORATION      DATE: 02/2009

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

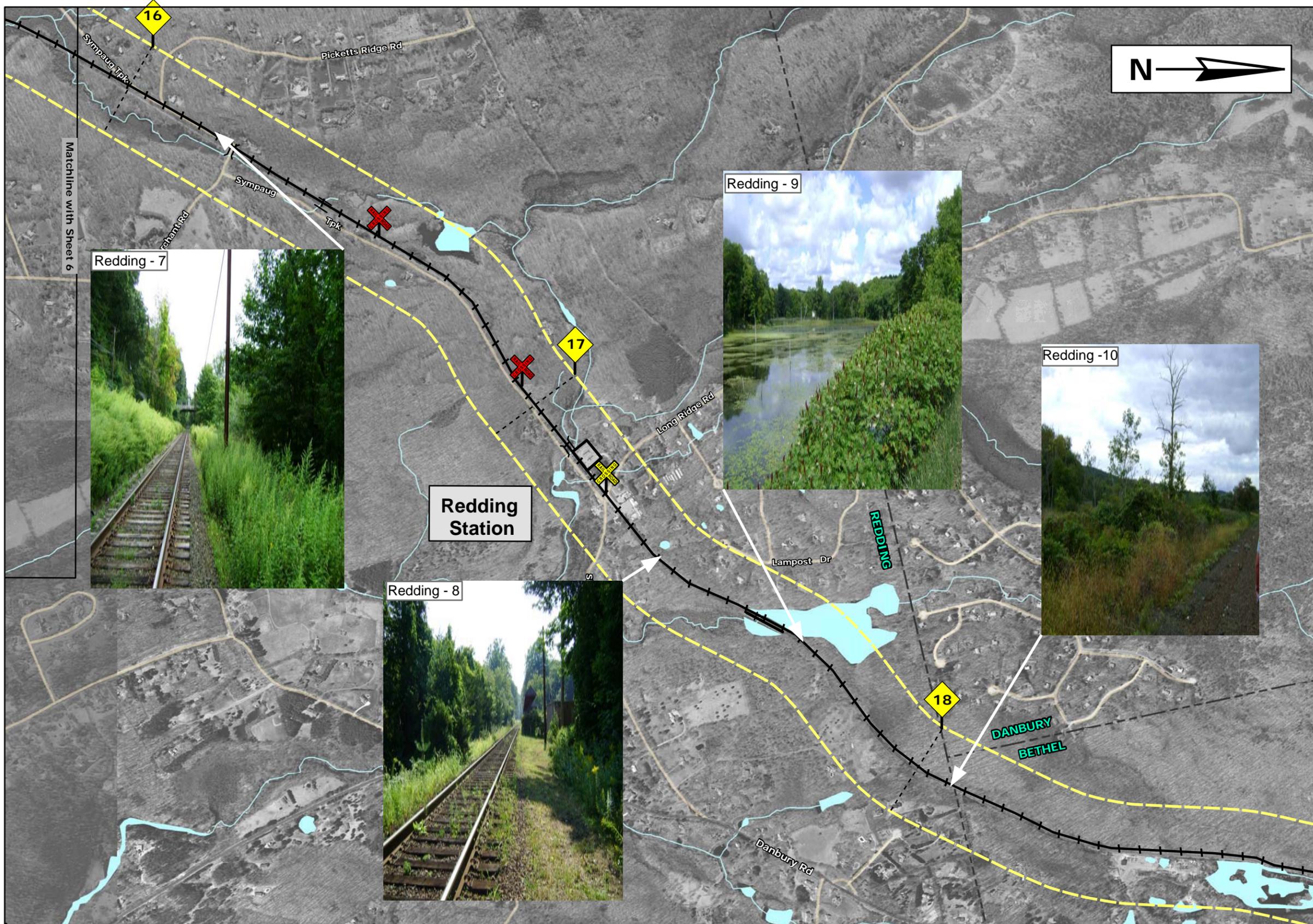
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PROJECT NO: **302-008**

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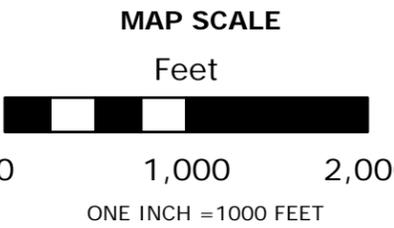
SHEET NO: **6 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
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- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
- Proposed Location of New Railroad Station
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- Railroad Crossing
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Data Sources:  
 Roads layer: CT DEP  
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 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and Grade Crossings: Metro-North Track Charts



PROJECT TITLE: **DANBURY BRANCH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM & ELECTRIFICATION ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

GIS MAPPING BY: URS CORPORATION DATE: 02/2009

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**



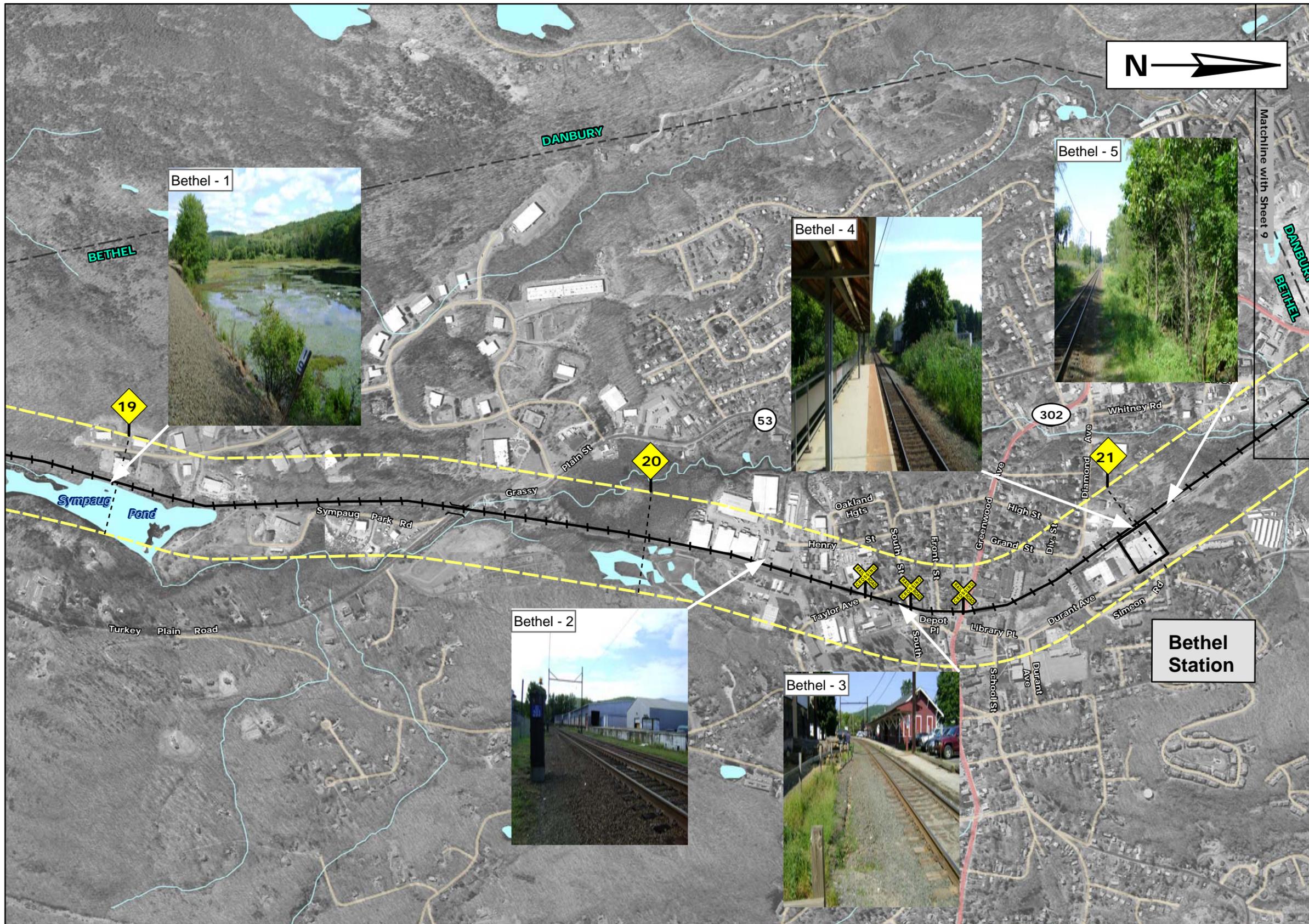
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PROJECT NO: **302-008**

MAP NO:

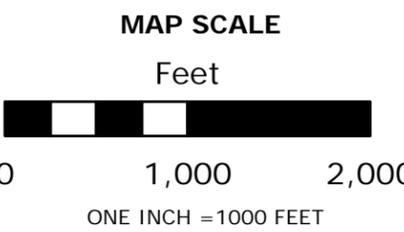
SHEET NO: **7 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
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- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
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Data Sources:  
 Roads layer: CT DEP  
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 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
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 RR Milepost Markers and Grade Crossings: Metro-North Track Charts



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**STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

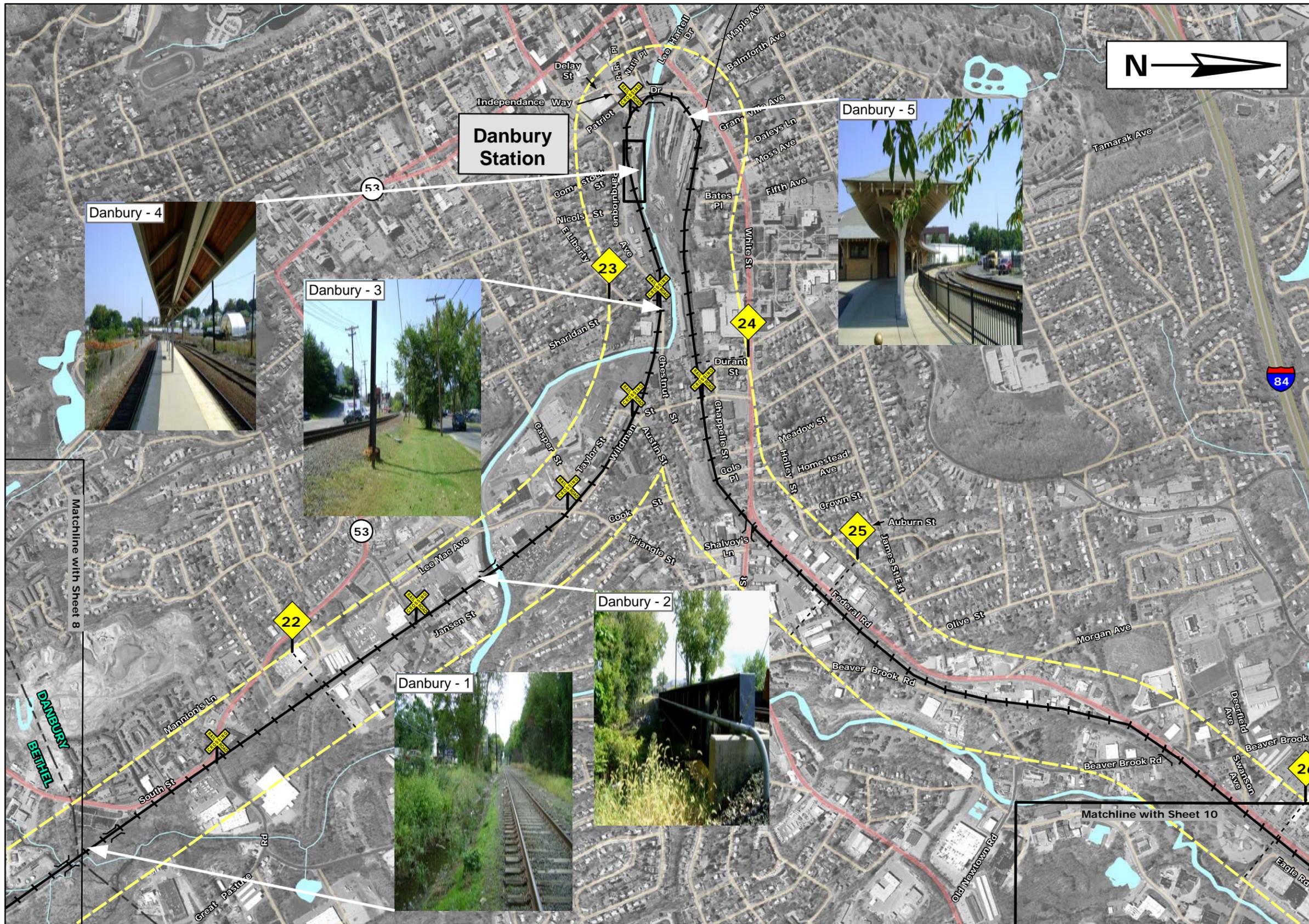
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MAP TITLE: **VISUAL RESOURCES**

PROJECT NO: **302-008**

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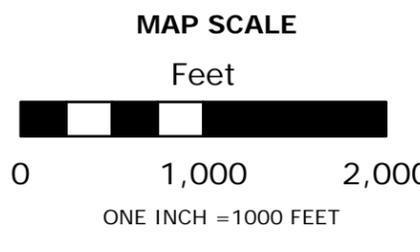
SHEET NO: **8 OF 14**



### Legend

- Railroad Track
- 1000 Foot Study Corridor
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
- Proposed Location of New Railroad Station
- Railroad Milepost Marker
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Data Sources:  
 Roads layer: CT DEP  
 RR Track: CT DEP  
 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and  
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GIS MAPPING BY: URS CORPORATION      DATE: 02/2009

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
 DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

TOWN(S): **DANBURY, BETHEL**

MAP TITLE: **VISUAL RESOURCES**

PROJECT NO:  
**302-008**

MAP NO:

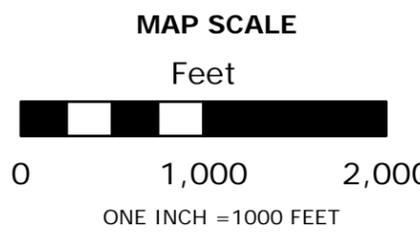
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**9 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
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**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
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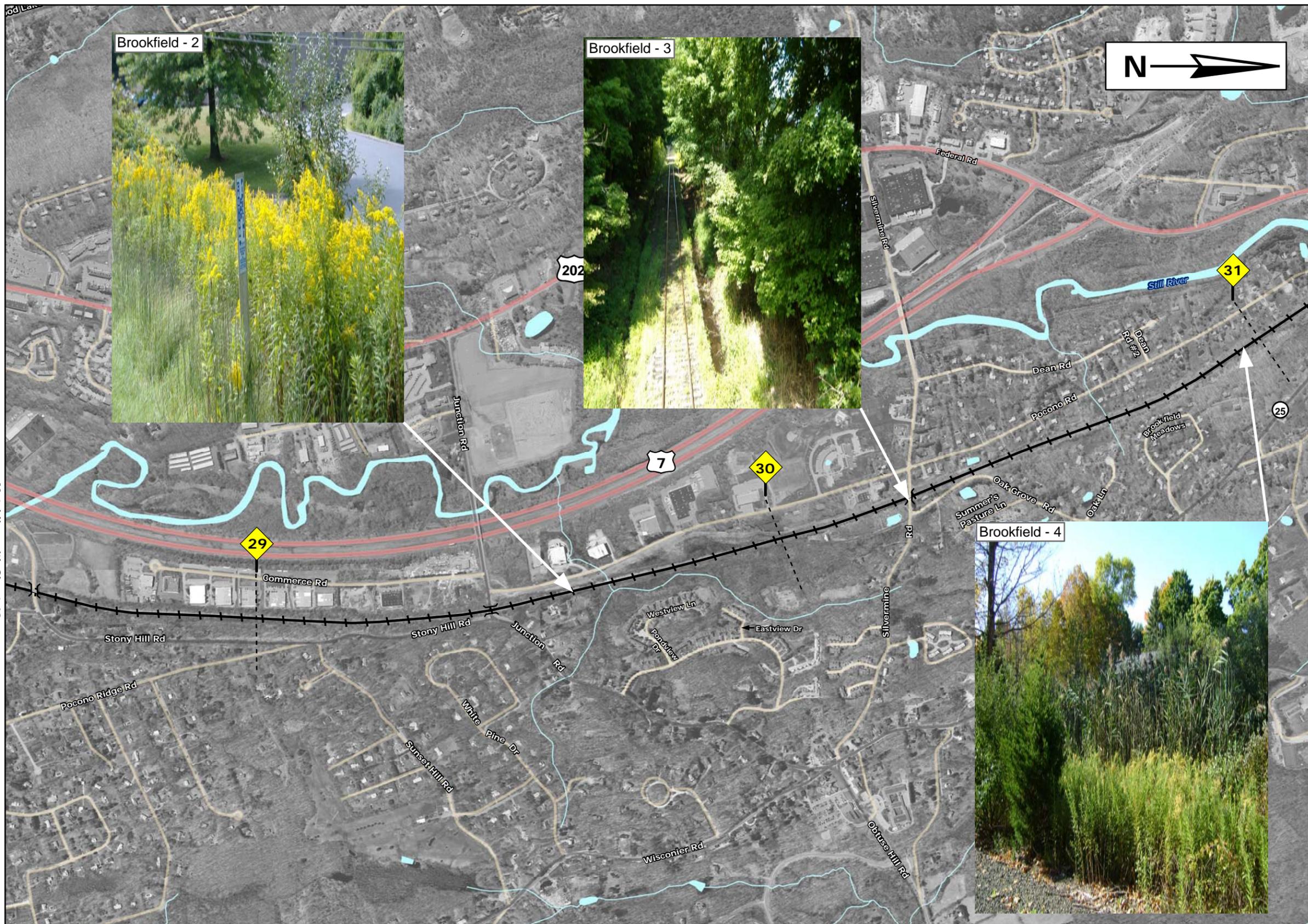
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PROJECT NO: **302-008**

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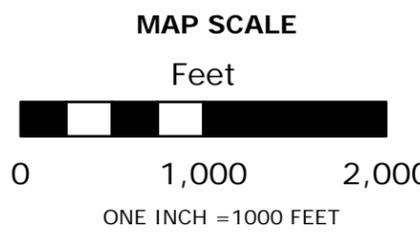
SHEET NO: **10 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
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 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
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 RR Milepost Markers and Grade Crossings: Metro-North Track Charts



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**STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

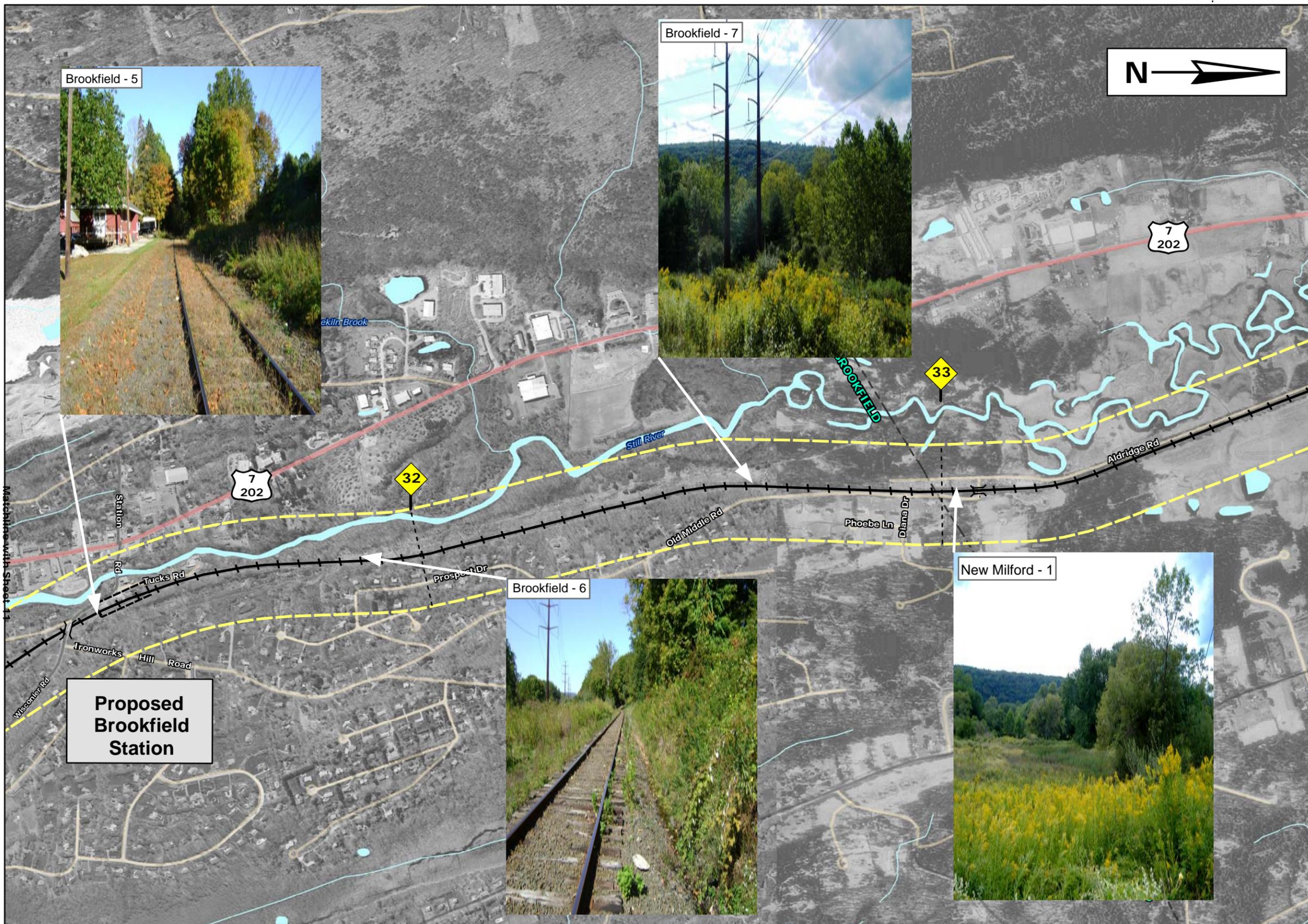
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PROJECT NO: **302-008**

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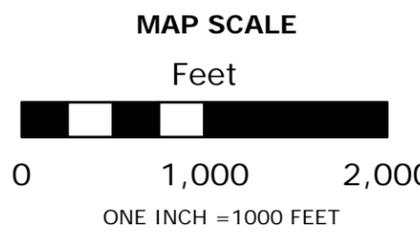
SHEET NO: **11 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
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**STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

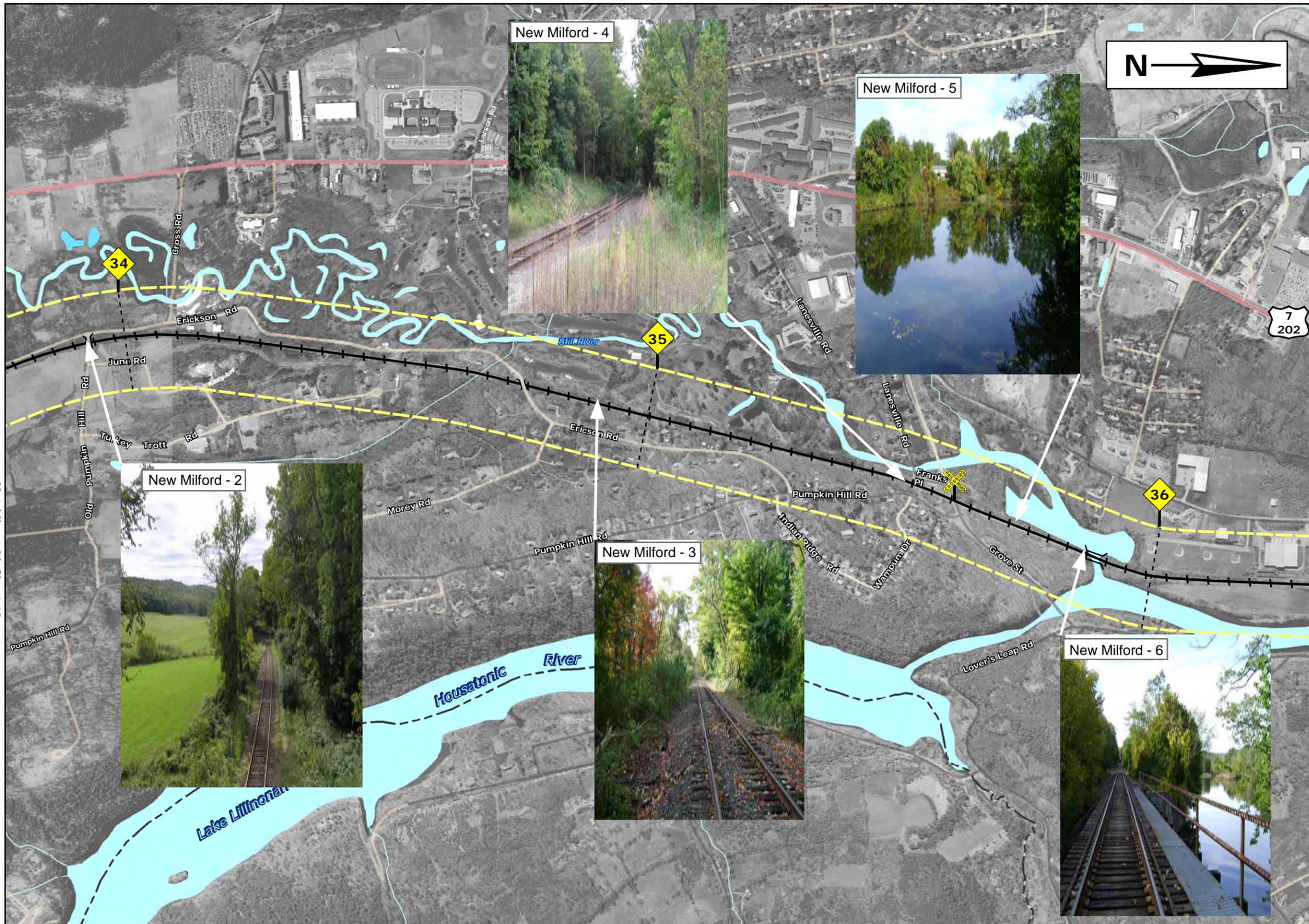
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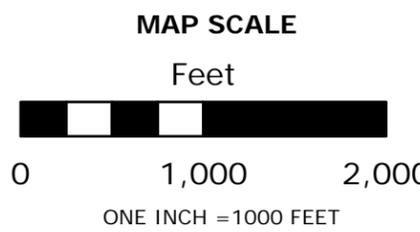
SHEET NO: **12 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
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- Town Boundary
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 RR Track: CT DEP  
 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and Grade Crossings: Metro-North Track Charts



Matchline with Sheet 12

Matchline with Sheet 14

PROJECT TITLE: **DANBURY BRANCH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM & ELECTRIFICATION ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

GIS MAPPING BY: URS CORPORATION      DATE: 02/2009

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

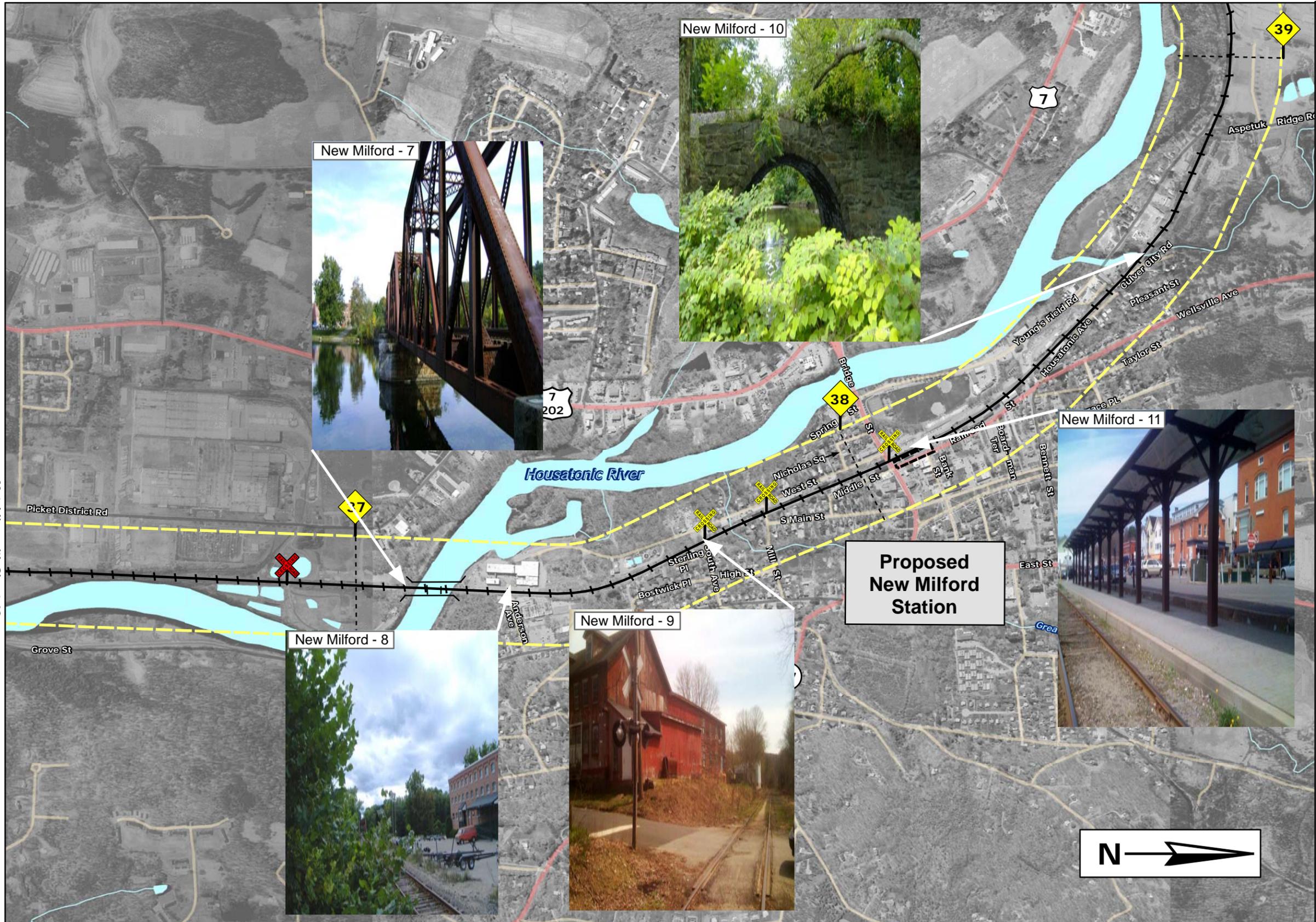
TOWN(S): **NEW MILFORD**

MAP TITLE: **VISUAL RESOURCES**

PROJECT NO: **302-008**

MAP NO:

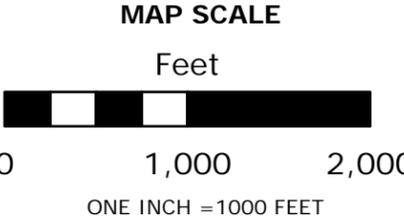
SHEET NO: **13 OF 14**



**Legend**

- Railroad Track
- 1000 Foot Study Corridor
- Town Boundary
- Railroad Station
- Proposed Location of New Railroad Station
- Railroad Milepost Marker
- Railroad Crossing
- Private Railroad Crossing
- Interstate Highway
- US Highway
- State Road
- Local Road
- Rivers/Streams
- Lakes/Ponds

Data Sources:  
 Roads layer: CT DEP  
 RR Track: CT DEP  
 Town Boundary: CT DEP  
 Hydrography: CT DEP  
 RR Milepost Markers and Grade Crossings: Metro-North Track Charts



PROJECT TITLE: **DANBURY BRANCH IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM & ELECTRIFICATION ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

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 DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

TOWN(S): **NEW MILFORD**

MAP TITLE: **VISUAL RESOURCES**

PROJECT NO: **302-008**

MAP NO:

SHEET NO: **14 OF 14**

Matchline with Sheet 13